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Source: *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 5-27
Published by: Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20839979
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THE QUR'ĀNIC OATHS: FARĀHĪ'S INTERPRETATION

MUSTANSIR MIR

I. PRELIMINARY

Many of the early Qur'ānic *sūrahs* contain oaths, typical of which are the oaths sworn by the sun and the moon, day and night, and light and darkness. While both Muslim and Western scholars have noted the phenomenon, no satisfactory explanation exists. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064 C.E.), dissatisfied with the standard explanation and unable to present an alternative, declared that the Qur'ānic oaths, together with the "broken letters," make up the category of verses called in Qur'ān 3:7 *mutashābihāt* ("ambiguous").[1] The only traditional writer known to have written a book on the subject is Ibn Qayyim (d. 1356 C.E.), who, in his *al-Tibyān fī Aqsām al-Qur'ān*, sets out to explain all the Qur'ān oaths. Ibn Qayyim, however, neither aimed at nor succeeded in presenting a systematic theory of the oaths, and, in many ways, his book represents and reinforces the standard explanation. The view about the Qur'ānic oaths entertained by the generality of Western scholars, too, as we shall see, does not come to grips with the principal issue. A modern Indian Muslim writer, Ḥamīd al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī[2] (1863–1930), has offered a new interpretation of the Qur'ānic oaths which, this paper will suggest, merits serious consideration. After reviewing the traditional Muslim and modern Western views on the subject, we shall examine Farāhī's interpretation. Farāhī explained only a few of the Qur'ānic oaths in the light of his theory, and it was left to his student, Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī,[3] to apply it to the rest of the oaths. For a fuller appreciation of the theory, therefore, we shall summarize, in Appendix I, Iṣlāḥī's treatment of the oaths not dealt with by Farāhī. A second appendix provides a synoptic classification of the Qur'ānic oaths according to the Farāhī–Iṣlāḥī interpretation.

II. TRADITIONAL VIEW

Basic Statement

Zarkashī (d. 1392 C.E.) defines an oath as *jumlatun yu'akkadu bihā'l-khabaru*[4] (a sentence that confirms a statement through emphasis). Suyūṭī (d. 1505 C.E.) describes it in similar

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terms: *al-qaṣdu bi'l-qasami taḥqīqu'l-khabarī wa tawkīduhū*[5] (The purpose of an oath is to confirm a statement and place emphasis upon it). In other words, the *muqsam bihī* (object of oath) serves to emphasize the point made in the *muqsam 'alayh* (complement of oath).[6] The notable thing, as will soon become clear, is the manner of achieving that emphasis: through identification of some kind of *'aẓamah* (glory, excellence, distinction) in the *muqsam bihī* (hereafter: MB). By the sheer force of its *'aẓamah*, the MB bears out the *muqsam 'alayh* (hereafter: MA). It is thus not necessary to establish a logical or causal connection between the MB and the MA in a given oath; all that is needed is ascertainment of *'aẓamah* in the MB. That done, the truth of the MA can be taken for granted.

Examples

We shall now document this view of the Qur'ānic oaths by taking a few examples from three major Qur'ān exegetes, Ṭabarī (d. 923 C.E.), Zamakhsharī (d. 1144 C.E.), and Rāzī (d. 925 C.E.).

According to Ṭabarī, "Qatādah maintained that, when God swears by certain objects, He does so in view of the exalted status they have in His eyes." Qatādah explains 92:2–3 by saying that night and day are "two great signs God wraps around the creation."[7] Ḍaḥḥāk, commenting on 89:2–3, says that God has sworn by "the ten nights in view of their known excellence over all the other days, and has singled out the day of sacrific (*shaf'*) and the day of 'Ārafah (*watr*) because of their known excellence over all the other nights."[8]

Zamakhsharī makes the following remark about 68:1: "He [God] has sworn by the pen in order to exalt it—for it points to the great wisdom that inheres in creating it and making it well, and because it carries countless benefits and advantages."[9] God has sworn by "the piercing star," Zamakhsharī says in reference to 86:1–3, "in order to glorify the extraordinary power and subtle wisdom it is known to represent."[10]

Rāzī, commenting upon 44:2, observes that the fact that God has sworn by the Qur'ān is proof of the excellence (*sharaf*) of the Qur'ān.[11] He explains 89:1–5 as follows:

> Know that these objects of oath, by which God has sworn, must represent either some kind of religious blessing (*fā'idah dīniyyah*) . . . or some kind of worldly good (*fā'idah dunyawiyyah*) that would necessitate the offering of gratitude, or a combination of both. Commentators have accordingly differed sharply in their interpretation of these things, each interpreting them in the light of his understanding of what is of the highest value in religion and of the greatest benefit in respect of worldly matters.[12]

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His comment on 90:1–2 is that the oath testifies to the great honour the town of Makkah possesses.[13] Discussing 103:1, Rāzī cites four interpretations of the word *'aṣr*: "time", "the beginning or end of a day," "the *'aṣr* prayer," and "the era of Muḥammad."[14] The common denominator of all four interpretations, as is evident from Rāzī's discussion, is glorification of the MB.

More examples can easily be found in the three exegetes, and also in others.[15] The unmistakable impression one gets from a study of traditional Qur'ān commentaries is that, in dealing with the oaths, the scholars are primarily interested in establishing the *'aẓamah* of the MB.

Comment

The major problem with the traditional interpretation is that it fails to address the question of the relationship between the MB and the MA. An oath, after all, is made up of an MB and an MA, and one cannot help asking how the two are related. What is the connection, one might ask in reference to 68:1–2, between the pen and the claim that Muḥammad is not a man possessed; or, in reference to 100:1–6, between swift horses and man's ingratitude; or, in reference to S. (=*sūrah*) 103, between time and the claim that a large number of human beings are losers in the end? If no definite relationship exists between the MB and the MA of an oath, then could one play a mix-and-match game with the Qur'ānic oaths, taking the MB of one *sūrah* and pairing it of with the MA of another, because the intended effect of *ta'ẓīm* (glorification, exaltation) of the MB would be produced regardless?

To say that the traditional interpretation of the Qur'ānic oaths ignores the question of the relationship between the MB and the MA is to say that it fails to account for the use of the oath in pre-Islamic Arabic literature. For the Qur'ān was not the first to employ the oath. In pre-Islamic Arabic literature, two main types of oaths are to be found, the first in poetry, which may, therefore, be called the poetical oath, and the second in the utterances of *kāhins*, which may be called the *kāhin* oath. The poetical oath is typified by such expressions as (i) *la 'amrī* (by my life), *la 'amru abīka* (by the life of your father), *bi rabbi'l-ka'bati* (by the Lord of the Ka'bah), and (ii) *wa farasī* (by my horse) and *wa rumḥī* (by my spear). In such oaths, the speaker seems to be trying to establish a connection between the MB and the MA: he presents the MB in support of the MA, and as a rule does so by staking his honour on the statement he makes. Typical of the *kāhin* oaths, on the other hand, are MB's that are often drawn from natural phenomena, but which seem to bear no connection to the MA's that follow; a lack of connection, in fact, seems to be one of the factors generating the mysterious aura that gives such an oath its power, and is, in all probability, consciously aimed at.

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These two types of oaths, it is important to keep in mind, are distinct from each other. In interpreting the Qur'ānic oaths, Muslim writers, quite understandably, attached no paradigmatic value to the *kāhin* oath. But, while they cited the poetical oath in discussions of the Qur'ānic oaths, it seems surprising that they failed to entertain the possibility that the Qur'ānic oaths, like the poetical oaths, sought to establish a relationship between the MB and the MA. But perhaps it was not so much inadvertant failure as conscious disregard. The poetical oath, when taken as a model for interpreting the Qur'ānic oaths, presented a theological problem. The thinking of Muslim writers probably went as follows. In swearing an oath one makes a solemn statement. In swearing an oath by a certain object, one presents that object as evidence supporting one's statement, staking one's honour on the statement made. That is what one finds in Arabic poetry. But the Qur'ān is God's very word, and God does not need to stake His honour on anything, and, consequently, does not need to cite anyone or anything in support of what He says. We should not, therefore, look at the objects He has sworn by as pieces of evidence for the statements made by Him, but should rather regard them as having been elevated in status for the simple reason that God has chosen to swear by them. But a difficulty arose at this point. If a poetical oath made a statement and supported it with evidence, while the Qur'ānic oath made a statement without corroborating it, then the former would, in a sense, be superior to the latter—and that would be unacceptable. There was, however, an easy way to vindicate the Qur'ān—by asserting that the poetical oath, too, did not provide evidence but simply lent rhetorical emphasis. In other words, not only was the poetical oath not taken as a model for interpreting the Qur'ānic oath, the poetical oath was reinterpreted in order to fit the model that had been created in order to solve a theological difficulty. It is in this vein that Rāzī says: "The Qur'ān was revealed in the language of the Arabs, and it was customary for the Arabs to reinforce their statements by means of oaths."[16] Here Rāzī uses the word "reinforcement" in the same sense in which Zarkashī and Suyūṭī use the word *taʾkīd* in describing the function of an oath (see above).

The Traditional View: A Qualification

Farāhī, as we shall see, argues that the Qur'ānic oaths are argumentative in nature. Before we present his view—and in order to judge how original that view is—it is necessary to ask whether the idea of an oath furnishing evidence (as in the poetical oath) is completely alien to the traditional understanding. A review of the sources would suggest that the idea is not totally absent; on occasions at least, we find writers attempting to establish logical connections between the MB and the MA. Let us take a few examples.

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Baydāwī (d. 1286 C.E.) writes in reference to 43:2: "It may be that God's swearing of an oath by certain objects is a mode of presenting proofs—in view of the evidence those objects furnish for the MA."[17] Ibn Kathīr (d. 1773 C.E.) remarks on 92:1–4 as follows: Since the objects sworn by in the oath are characterized by contrariety (night and day, male and female), the MA ("Indeed your efforts are diverse") is characterized by contrariety as well.[18] Nīsābūrī (d. 1446 C.E.) on several occasions tries to bring out the harmony between the MB and the MA. Discussing 84:16–19, he points out that a correspondence (*muṭābaqah*) exists between the MB (verses 16–18) and the MA (verse 19): the former speaks of the changes that take place in the heavens; the latter, of the changes that will take place in the hereafter. Undoubtedly, Nīsābūrī concludes, if God can effect changes of the one type, He should be capable of effecting changes of the other type also.[19] But perhaps the writer who more than any other seeks to establish such connections is Ibn Qayyim. For the moment one example from him will suffice. The point of the oath in 93:1–3, according to Ibn Qayyim, is that God, who does not allow the darkness of night to persist forever but dispels it by means of daylight, would, by renewing the process of sending revelation to Muḥammad, dispel the darkness caused by the interruption of revelation.[20]

These examples do indicate a concern with establishing a meaningful relationship between the MB and the MA. But, first, they consistitute an exception to the rule—the rule of discovering *'aẓamah* in the MB. Second, the relationships established in most of them are perhaps not truly logical. Baydāwī, while he suggests that the MB may serve as evidence for the MA, does not explain how the evidence is presented in the oath in 43:2; and the suggestion he makes is quite vague and tentative. Ibn Kathīr, in regard to 92:1–4, does no more than point out that the MB and the MA have similar content—which hardly makes the MB a proof for the MA. Nīsābūrī's contention about God's ability to effect changes is theoretically sound, but it is difficult to see in what sense does it constitute a proof in 84:16–19. The weakness of Ibn Qayyim's interpretation of 93:1–3 is shown by the fact that it could easily be inverted to produce the opposite result: just as God does not allow daylight to persist forever but causes nocturnal darkness to overtake it, the unbelievers might have argued, so He would not let the daylight of revelation (if, at all, they were to concede the comparison) continue but would allow it to be overtaken by the "darkness" by the interruption of revelation.

Here, then, we have yet another criticism of the traditional view: even when the scholars do make a deliberate attempt to estalish a relationship between the MB, and the MA, they conceive that relationship in such generalized terms as to fail to explain in what specific way, in a given case, the MB provides evidence for the MA.[21]

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And so we reach essentially the same conclusion that we had reached earlier, namely, that it is the MB that receives, practically in isolation from the MA, the main attention of the traditional scholars.

III. WESTERN VIEW

Statement

Theodor Nöldeke in his *Geschichte des Qorāns* discusses the phenomenon of the Qur'ānic oaths. Proposing a four-fold division of the Qur'ānic *sūrahs*, three Makkan and one Madīnan, he describes the First Makkan Period as follows:

> *Die Rede ist grossartig, erhaben und voll kühner Bilder, der rhetorische Schwung hat noch ganz poetische Färbung ... Die Gefühle und Ahnungen des Propheten äussern sich zuweilen in einer Dunkelheit des Sinnes, der überhaupt mehr angedeutet, als ausgeführt wird.*[22]

The Qur'ānic oaths are characteristic of this period: "*Eine eigentümliche, aber characteristische Erscheinung sind die in dieser Periode sehr häufig ... vorkommenden Schwüre, durche welche Muḥammed besonders im Anfange der Sūren die Wahrheit seiner Reden bekräftigt.*"[23] He compares the Qur'ānic oaths to the oaths sworn by the *kāhins* of Arabia:

> *Ebenso wie den Sag' hat er [Muḥammad] diesen Brauch den heidnischen Kāhinen abgesehen, welche ihre Aussagen durch feierliche Schwüre einzuleiten pflegten und hierbei weniger die Götter zu Zeugen anriefen als die verschiedensten Naturobjekte, wie Landschaften und Wegemale, Tiere und Vögel, Tag und Nacht, Licht und Finsterins, Sonne, Mond und Sterne, Himmel und Erde.*

The Qur'ān, however, has two other types of oaths as well, those in which an oath is sworn by the Last Day or Day of Judgement, and those—being the most difficult to explain—in which an oath is sworn by female beings.[24]

Comment

This is what may be called the standard Western view of the Qur'ānic oaths.[25] We have said above that pre-Islamic Arabic literature contains two types of oaths, the poetical and the *kāhin*, that the traditional Muslim writers do not consider the *kāhin* oath as having any paradigmatic value for interpreting the Qur'ānic oaths, and that, while explaining these oaths, they do cite the poetical oath, but not without reinterpreting it drastically, so as to avoid a possible theological problem. The Western view, on the other hand, disregards the poetical oath as a possible paradigm for the

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Qur'ānic oaths, and instead presents the *kāhin* oath as the model. But in doing so, it too fails to take into account the Qur'ān's categorical refutation of the view that revelation belongs to the genre of soothsaying (see 52:29; 69:42). Furthermore, the Qur'ānic oaths, according to Nöldeke, fall into three major categories, and it is only the first category—and that too only partially—that is represented by the *kāhin* oaths.

In one respect, however, the Western view is similar to the traditional Muslim view: in both, the oath is essentially a rhetorical device: it is used "to make the final assertion [MA] more impressive."[26]

IV. FARĀHĪ'S THEORY

Anatomy of an Oath

Farāhī holds that the principal function of the oath is to provide *dalīl* (argument) and *shahādah* (evidence). The Qur'ānic oaths are of this type: the MB furnishes evidence for the MA. An interesting aspect of Farāhī's theory is his attempt to see the oaths in a historical-linguistic perspective. The oath originated in the social need to ratify pacts and agreements. The ratification took many forms: handshake, the practice from which the word *yamīn* [right hand] came to mean "oath";[27] dipping hands into a bowl of water;[28] rubbing perfume on hands;[29] slaughtering an animal and sprinkling its blood on the parties involved in order to symbolize blood-relationship or, as in Exodus 24:5-8, to confirm a covenant;[30] and joining chords.[31] Now every such ratification took place in the presence of witnesses, who could testify to the occurrence of the event; in fact, to bear witness to an event is to declare that one was present at the scene of the event.[32] And that is the crux of an oath: what was sworn by MB was meant to serve as a witness to the truth of what was sworn to (MA).

Linguistically, the particles of oath are *bā'*, *wāw* and *tā'*. The first two obviously denote accopaniment (*ma'iyyah*) or the joining of one thing to another (*ḍammu'l-shay'i bi'l-shay'i*); the third is, like the *tā'* in *taqwā* and *tujāh*, a changed form (*maqlūb*) of *wāw*. Thus in swearing an oath by a person or a thing, one wishes that person or thing to "bear him company" or "stand by him." *Ta'ẓīm* of the MB may coincidentally occur in an oath but is not essential to it.[33]

This analysis is interesting in itself, but in offering it Farāhī makes two important points. First, he establishes a methodological base for his theory. We have noted above the importance that the traditional writers seem to attach to the theological perspective in arriving at an explanation of the Qur'ānic oaths. Farāhī is saying that the phenomenon of the oaths ought to be appraised from a literary and not a theological standpoint: the historical origins and

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linguistic understandings supply the framework within which the oaths must be studied. Second, Farāhī maintains that the MB, far from being the most important part of an oath, is only a means for validating the MA. For the oaths are an instrument of Qur'ānic logic and reasoning, and emphasis should be placed not on ascertaining the *'aẓamah* of the MB—since the latter does not have to be illustrious or magnificent at all—but on establishing a cogent relationship between the MB and the MA. The MA is the end, the MB is the means. In narrative order the MB comes first, but the MA has logical priority.[34]

Interpretation of the Oaths

We shall now look at Farāhī's explanation of some of the Qur'ānic oaths. The *Majmū'ah-i- Taḥāsīr-i-Farāhī* consists of commentary on fourteen of the shorter Qur'ānic *sūrahs*, and six of them contain oaths: 51, 75, 77, 91, 95, and 103.[35] We can divide these oaths into four categories. First, the *phenomenal* oath, in which individual or multiple phenomena of nature are sworn by. Second, the *historical* oath, which cites one or more events from the past. Third, the *experiential* oath, in which a certain facet of human experience is presented as evidence. Fourth, there is what, for want of a better word, may be called the *conjugate* oath, one in which a certain entity is shown to be a member of a pair and the existence of the other member is thus adduced.[36]

Phenomenal Oath

Of the six oaths discussed by Farāhī, two (51:1–6 and 77:1–6) belong to this category. In S. 51, verses 5–6 (MA) assert that human actions shall be recompensed in the hereafter. Verses 1–4, 7 (MB) produce the requisite evidence. As agents of divine mercy, the winds and rains have wiped out many a rebellious nation. But the some elements of nature which destroyed Noah's opponents and Pharaoh's troops also delivered Noah and Moses and their followers. This shows that God is not indifferent to man's conduct on earth: He rewards and punishes in this world, and He will do so in the next life as well.[37] S. 77 is similar to S. 51, and what has been said about S. 51 will hold for it, too.[38]

Historical Oath

Two oaths (95:1–6 and S. 103) fall in this category. In S. 95, the Qur'ān is not describing, as commentators generally believe it is,[39] the uses of the fig and the olive; rather, it is presenting a well-knit argument. The *sūrah* seeks to establish the meting out of recompense in the next life. Verses 4–6 are the MA, and they imply that people who make proper use of their faculties and powers will be rewarded, but those who misuse them will be punished.[40] Verse 7, by using the word *dīn* (recompense), elucidates the point further. The MA is supported with reference to four historic sites on earth.

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Tīn (fig) in verse 1 is not the fruit or tree known by that name, but, in accordance with the Arab custom of calling a place after its main produce, the name of a place. Nābighah speaks of the cold northerly winds that cause the light winter clouds to float around Mount Tīn,[41] and it is likely that he is referring to a mountain in the north, which could be either Mount Jūdī, which Arab poets associate with extreme cold, or some other nearby mountain.[42] At Tīn, the principle of divine reckoning was implemented on two historic occasions. The first occasion was when the disobedience of Adam and Eve cost them their celestial robes (7:27). The Torah tells us (Gen. 3–7) that it was with fig-leaves that they covered their nakedness. Adam and Eve later repented and were forgiven and blessed with guidance. Mount Tīn, thus, represents the principle in both its twin aspects of reward and punishment. The second occasion was when Noah's Ark stood atop Mount Jūdī (11–44) and Noah and his followers were saved and his opponents destroyed.[43]

Zaytūn (verse 2) is also the name of a place; it refers to the Mount of Olives, to which, according to the Gospels, Jesus repaired to worship and pray.[44] Farāhī cites, first, Psalm 118:22–23, and then Matt. 21:43–44 in explication of it, concluding that, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus (Luke 22:39–53; Mark 14:33–42; Matt. 26:36–46) invoked the principle of reckoning, as a result of which the kingdom of heaven was taken from one Abrahamic line, the Israelites, and given to the other, the Ishmaelites. The Mount of Olives thus also became a landmark in the history of the enactment of that principle.

The same is true of Mount Sinai (verse 3). It was here that the persecuted Israelites were rewarded for their steadfastness and given the Torah, the Law being meant to establish divine sovereignty and thwart the foes of God.[45]

It is no different with Makkah (verse 4). It was as a result of Abraham's unqualified submission to Him that God rewarded him and granted his prayer that Makkah be made "a land of peace" and a prophet raised in it. Also, Abraham was made "a leader of the people," but was told that God's promise of leadership for his progeny would not extend to the iniquitous among them (2:124). Furthermore, Makkah was to be a land of peace, and those who tried to rob it of its peace (as did Abrahah) would be punished. In this way Makkah, too, becomes a living testimony to the validity of the principle of reckoning.[46]

As for S. 103, the word *'aṣr* is usually translated as "time," but its principal use in Arabic is for the time past. In citing *'aṣr* as evidence of the loss that is in store for all men except the type described, the Qur'ān presents past history as evidence. According to the Qur'ān, the rise and fall of nations is governed by a set of moral laws, and the word *'aṣr* constitutes a compact

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reference to all those momentous events of history which the Qur'ān elsewhere narrates in detail in order to vindicate those moral laws.[47]

Experiential Oath

75:1–2. The MA, unexpressed, is that the hereafter is a certainty. But that precisely is the MB also: in verse 1 the Resurrection is sworn by. According to Farāhī, sometimes a thing is so self-evident as to be its own proof, and this is the case here: the hereafter is so certain and necessary, that it would suffice to swear by it to prove its occurrence. However, verse 2, another MB, provides proof as well: in miniature form, conscience represents the Grand Court that God will establish on the Last Day. Our intuitive experience of conscience gives evidence that God, who has planted this "reproachful self" in our beings will bring about a day of recompense as well.[48]

Conjugate Oath

91:1–10. The MA, again unexpressed, may be stated as follows: On the Last Day, God will judge human beings. The *sūrah* presents the argument from "complementary opposites." Things in this world exist in pairs whose members are apparently opposites but in reality necessary complements to each other. Examples are the sun and the moon, day and night, and the male and the female (verses 1–6). Like the physical world, the spiritual realm, too, with its categories of good and evil (verses 7–10), displays such opposition. And just as individual phenomena in the physical and spiritual realms have their complementary opposites, so the world, taken as a whole, has its complementary opposite, the next world, without which it would become inexplicable.[49]

Analysis and Observations

The purpose of a Qur'ānic oath, according to Farāhī's theory, is not to reinforce the MA or make it sound impressive but to present an argument. The theory thus suggests the need to draw a distinction between the formal and the functional aspects of the oaths: formally the oaths may be peculiar to the Makkan period, but functionally they could be similar to other devices that are used in both Makkan and Madīnan *sūrahs* to supply proof or evidence. In other words, the oaths would be studied primarily under the head of "Qur'ānic logic" rather than under the head of "Qur'ānic rhetorical devices."

Viewed thus, Farāhī's theory seeks, one might say, to integrate the arguments presented in the oaths with the arguments presented throughout the Qur'ān. For instance, past history is cited in numerous places in the Qur'ān as evidence of certain truths, and Farāhī's interpretation of S. 103 would appear to be a

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presentation of the same evidence in an abbreviated form. Similarly, the citing, in S. 51, of the winds and rains as proof of recompense in the hereafter is a reference, again abbreviated, to the principles of recompense that has been elaborated in many other places in the Qur'ān. On a larger scale, one might argue, the oaths, as interpreted by Farāhī, give us an insight into the relationship between the Makkan and the Madīnan *sūrahs*: the same arguments that are presented with brevity in the Makkan *sūrahs* are presented in greater detail in the Madīnan. A problem arises at this point, however. Unlike the "detail" of the Madīnan period, the "brevity" of the Makkan period, as seen in the oaths, is not without ambiguity—or Ibn Ḥazm would not have classified the oaths as *mutashābihāt* and the traditional Muslim scholars would not have differed in their opinions about the referents of the MB's in the oaths. The question arises: how can one be sure, in the case of S. 51 for example, that the referents in the first four verses are the winds and no other thing—or being—or that *tīn, zaytūn*, Mount Sinai (*ṭūr sīnīn*), and Makkah (*al-balad al-amīn*) ín S. 95 stand only for the sites indentified by Farāhī? While no completely satisfactory answer to this question can be given, it seems reasonable to hold that the interpretation of an oath should be evaluated not only for self-consistency but also for consistency with the context in which the oath occurs and, perhaps, with the thematic content of the Qur'ān as a whole. If this is a valid test, then Farāhī's explanations of the Qur'ānic oaths would seem to pass it with a comfortable margin.

Farāhī's theory seems to compare favourably, on several counts, with the traditional. First, Farāhī's basic contention seems to be correct, namely, that the key to the meaning of an oath is to be found in the relationship between the MB and the MA, for, as remarked earlier, an oath is composed of an MB and an MA. For all practical purposes the idea that the oath presents an argument is new, for the traditional scholars give it only marginal recognition; the thrust of their work on the subject being very different.

Second, Farāhī's theory is methodologically superior. Instead of viewing the oaths through theological lenses, Farāhī looks at them from a historical-linguistic perspective. Consequently, unlike the traditional scholars, whose inability—or was it reluctance?—to see the element of evidence in a Qur'ānic oath led them to deny the presence of evidence in the poetical oath (see section II, above), Farāhī has offered a theory that can be applied to the poetical (see below) as well as to the Qur'ānic oath.

Third, Farāhī's interpretations of the six oaths are plausible, coherent, and contextually meaningful. His account of 95:1-6, for example, not only establishes a definite connection between the MB and the MA, it gives the oath remarkable internal consistency: all four MB's (fig, olive, Sinai, Makkah) have a common MA, and each is directly and clearly connected to it. His attempt to draw on the

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Bible and Classical Arabic poetry adds to the richness of the interpretation. Farāhī also succeeds rather well in accounting for the specificness of the MB of a given oath. The oaths in Ss. (*Sūrahs*) 51, 91, and 95, for example, have the same MA (recompense in the hereafter), but the MB in each *sūrah* is different. And in each case Farāhī tries to bring out the specific relation the MB bears to the MA. His method is thus in marked contrast to, for example, Bayḍāwī's, discussed above with reference to 51:1–6 and 52:1–8 (see n. 21, above). His explanation of 51:1–6 makes the oath fit the context of the whole *sūrah*. The *sūrah* cites the workings of the winds and rains as proof that God will bring about the Day of Judgement. This idea is supported in the *sūrah* itself with reference to several peoples in whose destruction the winds and rains were instrumental, and is brought out in greater detail in many other places in the Qur'ān. In S. 103 the word *'aṣr*, taken as a reference to history as viewed by the Qur'ān, becomes a rich and variegated mass of evidence compressed into a single word. The possibility of linking an oath ideationally with the broader segments of the Qur'ān obviously gives it considerable depth.

A few remarks need to be made about Farāhī's insistence that *ta'ẓīm* is not essential to the oath. Farāhī holds this view for two reasons. First, there are oaths in Arabic poetry that are made up simply of words like *aqsama*, *ālā*, and *ḥalafa* (all three meaning "to swear"), and contain no MB. Imru'l-Qays, for example, says: *wa ālat ḥalfatan lam taḥallalī* (And she swore an oath that remained unbroken).[50] Second, poets sometimes swear by things that lack *'aẓamah*, or are even positively inglorious. Abu'l 'Uryān, praising Ḥātim's generosity, swears by cooking-pots and shining knives;[51] Hijris, upon avenging his father, boasts of his horse, spear, and sword;[52] and 'Urwah ibn Murrah al-Hudhalī satirizes a certain Abū Umāmah's call to the tribe of Bakr for help, swearing by the *markhah* tree, proverbial for weakness and hardly something to glorify—"By the *markhah* tree," he says, "what a dreadful call!"[53] Farāhī contends that these poets, far from glorifying the objects they are swearing by, are presenting proofs for the statements they are making. Thus Abu'l 'Uryān is saying that people would testify to Ḥātim's generosity, and so would the cooking-pots and knives, if only they could speak. Hijris cites his horse, spear, and sword, arguing that, being capable of riding a horse and wielding spear and sword, he could not have let his father's killer go free;[54] and 'Urwah ibn Murrah likens the tribe of Bakr to the *markhah* tree, the comparison allowing him to ridicule the idea of calling the Bakr for help.[55]

Farāhī's reasons for denying *'aẓamah* to the MB are not very convincing; nor do they lend support to his own theory. Several points may be made. First, if an oath lacks an MB (as in the line from Imru'l-Qays), it might simply mean that the MB was actually uttered but the poet did not reproduce the oath in full. Second,

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in several of the Qur'ānic oaths the MA is left out. Does that mean that the MA is inessential to the oath? Third, the question as to what things possess *'aẓamah* and what things do not, is a relative one; in fact it is a question of how *'aẓamah* is to be defined. To an Arab, horses and swords and spears were certainly possessed of it, for they were associated with his honour, and if one could swear by one's honour, one could certainly swear by things associated with it. As for the *markhah* tree, it may lack *'aẓamah*, but then the verse is satirical, and swearing by something inglorious suits the occasion. It seems that, in his concern to establish the argumentative character of the oath, Farāhī sets up a needless dichotomy between glorification and argument, for they do not have to be mutually exclusive.

In another sense also the dichotomy is unwarranted. Farāhī holds that the Qur'ānic oaths are not rhetorical flourishes but pieces of reasoning. But the question is: Is the rhetorical element completely excluded? The oaths, after all, do not present syllogisms. Nor is the connection between the MB and the MA always very obvious. Plausible as Farāhī's interpretation of, for example, 95:1–6 is, it is the result of considerable reflection on Farāhī's part, and does not tell us much about the impact the oath might have had on the first audience of the Qur'ān. Can it be denied that the immediate effect of the oath upon that audience was of a kind other than rhetorical? The very fact that most of the Qur'ānic oaths are composed of short, rhyming expressions and many have a highly referential style shows that the form was supposed to have persuasive force independently of the content. The form of the oaths is thus no less important than their content, it may even condition the nature of that content. The oaths do not make an appeal to the mind only; rather, with their rhymes, images, and staccato style, they also excite the imagination and stir the feelings. Their aim is not only to convince but also to move, and what they present, therefore, is not just cold reasoning but vibrant thought. This is not to say that the Qur'ānic oaths are not argumentative, only that they should not be viewed as material fit for cerebral exercises only.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The question whether Farāhī's understanding of the Qur'ānic oaths corresponds to the understanding of the first audience of the Qur'ān is difficult to answer. But the main difficulty here stems not from a lack of historical evidence in support of Farāhī's view, but from a lack of such evidence in support of any view at all. For if the traditional theory of the Qur'ānic oaths seems to be so well entrenched, then it is not because the first addressees of the Qur'ān are definitely known to have subscribed to it, but because no alternative theory of the oaths has been put forward. This being the case, Farāhī's theory should be compared with the traditional theory in respect of whether it offers a more cogent and meaningful explanation of the data and problems involved.

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There is the question of extra-Qur'ānic parallels. Nöldeke likens the Qur'ānic oaths to the oaths sworn by the *kāhins* of Arabia.[56] But one could argue that oaths occuring in standard Arabic poetry rather than those occuring in the utterances of soothsayers ought to be taken as the model for the Qur'ānic oaths. For, if the Qur'ānic oaths are a form of reasoning, and the oaths in Arabic poetry can be interpreted similarly (see above Farāhī's interpretation of the verses of Abu'l ʿUryān, Hijris, and ʿUrwah ibn Murrah) then the two would be fundamentally different from the soothsayers' oath. One might even argue that, in the hands of the soothsayer, the oath degenerated into a form of tawdry embellishment.

Whether one accepts or rejects Farāhī's theory, in whole or in part, it can hardly be doubted that Farāhī's ideas are both important and challenging. One test of the value of his theory would be the extent to which it can help explicate the oaths he did not discuss. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī took up this task in his Qur'ān commentary, and Appendix I provides a summary of his treatment of those oaths.[57]

APPENDIX I

SUMMARY OF IṢLĀḤĪ'S TREATMENT OF THE REMAINING OATHS

In addition to the four categories of oaths already given (Section IV), three new categories are here established: *scriptural*, in which scripture is the MB; *composite*, in which the MB's belong to more than one category; and *other* oaths, which cannot be subsumed under the first six categories.

Iṣlāḥī makes a good attempt at interpreting the oaths according to Farāhī's theory; the net effect of his work being to reinforce that theory; In the following account, which is necessarily brief, it is not possible to state in detail Iṣlāḥī's reasons for explaining the oaths in the way he does. Nevertheless, it will probably be agreed that most of his explanations are quite plausible. Perhaps the most cogent interpretation he has offered is that of 100:1-6. Bell-Watt (p. 78) remark that "[t]he sense of the first five verses is here uncertain," and that the verses following verses 1-6 "may be part of the original assertion or may have been added later . . . . " On Iṣlāḥī's interpretation, the sense of the first five verses no longer remains uncertain, and, what is more, the six verses connect smoothly with the

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rest of the *sūrah*, obviating the need for the hypothesis of later insertion. Also notable are Iṣlāḥī's explanations of 52:1–8; 68:1–4; 74:32–36 86:11–14; 89:1–5; 90:1–4; 92:1–4; and 93:1–3.

Phenomenal

There are nine oaths in this category: 53:1–4; 56:75–80; 74:32–36; 79:1–5; 81:15–19; 84:16–19; 86:1–4, 11–14; 89:1–5.

The oath in S. 53 refutes a certain charge against Muḥammad (peace be on him). The Quraysh called him a *kāhin*. One of the assumptions of Arabian *kahānah* was that the stars influence human life, and that study of the stars and their movements constitutes an important foundation of the system of *kahānah*. Verses 1–4 imply that the stars are subject to a law imposed upon them by God. They rise—their magnificent appearance leading some to ascribe deity to them—but they set also, prostrating themselves before God (cf. 55:6) and proclaiming His deity. Since they are the creatures and servants of God, they may not be apotheosized or venerated. It would thus be foolish to regard them as a source of good and harm, knowledge and inspiration, and it would be an even greater folly to regard Muḥammad (peace be on him) as a *kāhin*, a man whose teaching aims at eradicating such myths. (Iṣlāḥī, 7:50–53.)

56:75–80 refutes a similar charge. The *nujūm* are the "shooting stars." The *mawāqi' al-nujūm*, therefore, are "the falling-places of meteors," and imply, in the light of 67:5 and 72:89, that the *jinn* who try to listen in on the proceedings of the Superior Council in the heavens are pelted with meteors. The *jinn* thus have no access to the realm of the *ghayb* (roughly: "unseen"), and the Prophet does not receive his revelations through them, but through angels—"the pure ones" (verse 79)—who bring down intact a revelation whose ultimate origin is the Preserved Tablet (verse 78). (*Ibid.*, 7:182–184.)

74:32–36. The Last Day is going to come, but it is part of a plan that cannot be hurried: like the moon which passes through many phases before becoming full, this world will pass through its destined phases, culminating in the hereafter. And just as night, when it comes, makes one wonder whether morning will ever arrive but at the appointed time makes way for it, so will at the appointed time this world, whose darkness conceals the morning of the hereafter, make way for the Last Day. The coming of day after every night is a reminder that the Last Day is a reality. (*Ibid.*, 8:60–62.)

79:1–5. An oath sworn by the winds and rainclouds. The MA is unexpressed, but the point of the oath is the same as that in 51:1–7 and 77:1–7 (see Section IV above). (*Ibid.*, 8:175–177.)

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81:15–21. Verses 15–16 make the same point that is made in 53:1–4, 56:75–80 (see above), and 69:38–43 (see below): Muḥammad is a prophet, and his pronouncements about the hereafter may not be likened to those of a *kāhin* about the future. Verses 17–18 (cf. 74:32–36, above) reinforce the MB. (*Ibid.*, 8:224–228.)

84:16–19. The hereafter will come, but in accordance with the divine plan concerning it. With the evening glow arrives night, bringing with it the moon and stars. All these things testify to the inexorable evolutionary law to which they are subject, and to which this world, too, is subject. Night comes on, but evolves into day; stars rise, but eventually set; the moon waxes, only to wane. The inhabitants of this earth, likewise, will one day find themselves in the next world, into which this world will evolve after going through its destined course (*ṭabaqan ʿan ṭabaqin*). (*Ibid.*, 8:276–278.)

86:1–4. Satanic beings who try to approach the higher heavenly regions are pelted with meteors (see 56:75–80, above). This shows that the universe is being closely watched. And it implies that human beings, too, are under observation: they have not been left to their own devices, but will one day be held accountable for their actions. (*Ibid.*, 8:301–302.)

86:11–14. The hereafter is not an impossibility. One often witnesses that the heavens and the earth are closed up—no sign of rain above or of vegetation below—but, all of a sudden, abundant rain descends and the earth grows lush vegetation (cf. 21:30). So it is with the hereafter: difficult to conceive as it may be, there is no doubt about its coming. (*Ibid.*, 8:304–305.)

89:1–5. The MA, unexpressed, is that the hereafter is a certainty. The approaching dawn and the receding night testify to it (cf. 74:32–36 and 84:16–19, above). Further testimony is provided by the ten days during which the waxing—and the ten days during which the waning—of the moon is most noticeable. Also, things in this world exist in pairs, one member of a pair being incomplete without the other. Every existent, therefore, has two aspects. Taken by itself, it is "single"; taken as a member of the pair it belongs to, it is "paired." And like all things, this world would not be complete without the other member of its pair—the next world. (*Ibid.*, 8:346–354.)

Historical

90:1–4. The "father and son" (verse 3) are Abraham and Ishmael. The oath reminds the Quraysh of the difficult times in which their ancestors lived in Makkah, pointing out that their present affluence is the result of the prayer Abraham made when he settled Ishmael in Arabia (14:35–37), and that they should not be deluded into thinking that they are beyond the reach of God. (*Ibid.*, 8:369–372.)

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Experiential

100:1–5. The charging, dust-raising, invading horses are sworn by in verses 1–4 (MB), and verse 5 makes the assertion (MA): "Indeed man is very ungrateful to his Lord." The oath points up the contradiction between man's attitude as master and his attitude as servant. As the master of the horse, he expects and gets dedicated service in return for the fodder he gives the animal: the *sūrah* presents the picture of horses exerting themselves in the service of man. As the servant of God, Who takes care of him in many more ways, he forgets his own obligation to Him. The MB in the *sūrah* thus constitutes damning evidence against man, and the MA stands proven: man is ungrateful to his Lord. (*Ibid.*, 8:500–503.) (Stressing the word *insān* while reading the verse will bring out the contrast effectively: it is man who is ungrateful, not animals.)

Scriptural

There are six oaths in this category: 36:2–4; 38:1; 43:2; 44:2; 50:1; 68:1–4. The argument in 36:2–4 is that a book containing such wisdom can be presented only by a true prophet. (*Ibid.*, 5:398–399). The MA in the next four oaths is unexpressed, but the oaths are not difficult to explain. The point of 38:1 is that the various kinds of Qur'ānic reminders ought to convince the Quraysh that the punishment of which they are being warned will overtake them if they persist in denial. (*Ibid.*, 5:509–510.) 43:3 (*ibid.*, 6:207) and 44:2 (*ibid.*, 6:267) say that an illuminating book like the Qur'ān can come only from God. 50:1 states that the Noble Qur'ān cannot be the product of a poet, *kāhin*, or sorcerer, but is from God and, accordingly, its warning about the resurrection and recompense should be taken seriously. (*Ibid.*, 6:533–535) 68:1–4, the last oath in this category, presents scripture as evidence that Muḥammad is a true prophet. The "pen" refers to the scriptures that already exist, especially the Torah, and "what they are writing" stands for the Qur'ān. The nobility and sanity of the Prophet's message, as also the identity of this message with that found in the earlier scriptures, should be sufficient proof that the Prophet is not a man possessed but a prophet of God. (*Ibid.*, 7:512–514.)

Conjugate

Two oaths fall in this category: 92:1–4 and 93:1–3. 92:1–4 adduces an argument from complementary opposites. Night requires day for its completion, and male requires female for his fulfillment. Similarly, this world, in order to be purposeful, requires that there be another life. For the quality of human actions differs, and reason demands that good actions be rewarded and evil actions punished. And to that end there must be a hereafter. (*Ibid.*, 8:401–402.)

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93:1–3 says that just as this world needs not only the light and warmth of the day but the darkness and peace and quiet of the night as well, so is it necessary that, for purposes of spiritual and ethical discipline, Muḥammad face easy and difficult circumstances both. Difficult circumstances thus do not indicate that God has abandoned the Prophet. (*Ibid.*, 8:412–413.)

Composite

There are three oaths in this category: 52:1–8; 69:38–40; 85:1–3. In S. 52 the MA is verses 7–8: God metes out punishment for disbelief and rebelliousness. All the MB's (verses 1–6) support the MA. *Ṭūr* in verse 1 is Mount Sinai, which is of historic importance: it was here that Moses was given the Torah and commanded to go to Pharaoh and warn him against repudiating the divine message; and it was this mountain which God shook up, warning the Israelites to abide by the Torah (7:171 and elsewhere). *Kitāb masṭūr fī raqq manshūr* (verses 1–2) is the Torah, which contains, on the one hand, clear statements about the principle of reckoning, and, on the other, historical records of the implementation of that principle, thus bearing witness that the principle will continue to operate in this world and into the hereafter. *Al-bayt al-ma'mūr* (verse 3) and *al-saqf al-marfū'* (verse 4) refer, respectively, to the heavens and the earth. The heavens and the earth are full of signs that make the principle of recompense a certainty—and so is the ocean full of signs (verse 6), two well-known instances being the destruction of Noah's opponents and of Pharaoh and his people. (*Ibid.*, 7:15–21.)

69:38–40. Proofs of the hereafter are of two kinds, those which can be seen with the physical eye and those which can be apprehended rationally, and both types suggest the possibility, in fact necessity, of the hereafter. It is therefore unwise to reject the Prophet's pronouncements about the hereafter as the statements of a *kāhin;* they are not, rather they are the revelations brought down by an angel. (*Ibid.*, 7:551–552.)

85:1–3. The MA, unstated, is that the hereafter is definitely going to be. God is not unmindful of what men are doing: in the heavenly fortresses He has appointed angels who keep a constant eye on the world, including man. The Last Day is inevitable and, as such, is its own proof, though for one who desires proof, the universe is full of proofs, provided one has observant eyes. (*Ibid.*, 8:287–288, 289.)

Others

Four oaths make up this category. In 37:1–5 angels are sworn by. The point of the oath is that the Arabian pagans have foolishly set up the angels to be deities, for the angels themselves are busy worshipping and glorifying God. Verse 5 ("Your deity is but One") is the MA, and the implication is that God alone must be

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worshipped, angels in no way partaking of His deity. (*Ibid.*, 5:450–451.) In 10:53 (*ibid.*, 3:312), 34:3 (5:290), and 64:7 (*ibid.*, 7:418) the Prophet swears by God. The word *rabb* in these verses contains a subtle hint—and proof—that *rubūbiyyah* (providential care) necessitates accountability and a day of reckoning: God, Who gives man so many blessings, is not about to let him go without making him explain how he reacted to those blessings. (Certain Qur'ānic verses, depicting scenes of the Last Day, represent the idolators [6:23] and the deniers of the hereafter [6:30; 46:34] as swearing by God (*rabb*) as they acknowledge their error. These are not, properly speaking, oaths.)

APPENDIX II

CLASSIFICATION OF THE QUR'ĀNIC OATHS

This classification is based on the treatment of the oaths by Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī. The figure in parentheses following the class-name indicates the number of times that type of oath occurs in the Qur'ān. Following the *sūrah* and verse number, the MB's are briefly identified. The oaths discussed by Farāhī are indicated by a capital F in brackets.

I. **Phenomenal (11)**

51:1–7: winds and rainclouds [F].

53:1–4; 56:75–80: stars.

74:32–36: moon, night, day.

77:1–7; winds [F].

79:1–5: winds and rainclouds.

81:15–19: stars, night, day.

84:16–19: evening glow, night, moon.

86:1–4: stars.

86:11–14: heaven and earth.

89:1–5: daybreak, ten nights, even and odd, night.

II. **Historical (3)**

90:1–4: Makkah, Abraham and Ishmael.

95:1–6: four historic sites [F].

103: time [F].

III. **Experiential (2)**

75:1–2: conscience [F].

100:1–6: horse.

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IV. **Scriptural (6)**

36:2–4; 38:1; 43:2; 44:2; 50:1: Qur'ān.

68:1–2: pen [= earlier scriptures] and what is being written. [= Qur'ān].

V. **Conjugate (3)**

91:1–10: sun–moon, day–night, heaven–earth, good–evil [F].

92:1–4: night–day, male–female.

93:1–3: day–night.

VI. **Composite (3)**

52:1–8: Sinai, Torah, earth, heaven, ocean.

69:38–40: perceptible and imperceptible phenomena.

85:1–3: heaven, Last Day, observer [= man, who is a witness to the signs of God in the world] and object of observation [= world].

VII. **Others (4)**

10:53; 34:3: God.

37:1–4: angels.

64:7: God.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Ibn Ḥazm: Ḥayātuhū wa ʿAṣruhū, Fiqhuhū wa Ārāʾuhū* (Cairo: [Preface 1373/1954]), pp. 284–285.
2. For a brief life-sketch of Farāhī, see Mir, Mustansir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān: A study of Iṣlāḥī's concept of Naẓm in Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān*, (Indianapolis: 1986), pp. 6–8. Farāhī's views on the subject are found in two of his works: *Imʿān fī Aqsām al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo: 1349 A.H.) in which he states his theory, and *Majmūʿah-i-Taṣānīf-i-Farāhī*, (Urdu translation by Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (Lahore: 1393/1973) which is a collection of his commentaries on a small number of the Qur'ānic *sūrahs*.
3. For a biographical note on Iṣlāḥī, see Mir, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9. Iṣlāḥī wrote a eight-volume Qur'ān commentary, *Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān*, (Lahore: 1967–1980) according to the exegetical principles laid down by Farāhī.
4. Zarkashī, Badr al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Bahādur al-. *Al-Burhān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 4 vols. in 2, ed. Muḥammad Abu'l Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: 1376–1377/1957–1958), 3:40.

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5. Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-. *Al-Itqān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 2 vols. (Cairo: 1368, Lahore Reprint: 1394/1974), 2:133.
6. The *muqsam 'alayh* may be stated or understood; in the latter case, it is to be inferred from the context.
7. Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 30 vols. in 12 (Cairo: 1373/1954), 30:217.
8. *Ibid.*, 30:170.
9. Zamakhsharī, Abu'l Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-. *Al-Kashāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl*, 4 vols. (Cairo: 1385/1966), 4:141.
10. *Ibid.*, 4:241.
11. Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar al-. *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 32 vols., (Cairo: 1353-1381/1934-1962), 27:239.
12. *Ibid.*, 31:162.
13. *Ibid.*, 31:181.
14. *Ibid.*, 32:84-86.
15. See, for example, Qurṭubī, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ahmad al-. *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 20 vols. (Cairo: 1935-1960), 19:91 (Q. [= Qur'ān] 75:2); 19:189 (Q. 79:1); 20:62 (Q. 90:4). Bayḍāwī, Abu'l Khayr 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar al-. *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Tawīl*, 2 vols., 2nd printing (Cairo: 1388/1968), 2:493 (Q. 68:1); 2:574 (Q. 103:1). Nīsābūrī, Niẓām al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥasan al-Qummī al-. *Gharāib al-Qur'ān wa Raghāib al-Furqān*, 30 vols., ed. Ibrāhīm 'Aṭwah 'Awaḍ (Cairo: 1381-1390/1962-1970), 29:18 (Q. 68:1); 30:37 (Q. 81:15-16); 30:62 (Q. 85:1); 30:89 (Q. 89:1-5); 30:98 (Q. 90:1-2); 30:105 (Q. 91:1); 30:114 (Q. 93:1); 30:172 (Q. 103:1). Abū Ḥayyān, (=Athīr al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf,), *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 8 vols. (Riyadh: n.d.), 8:474 (Q. 90:1-2); 8:509 (Q. 103:1). Ibn Kathīr, 'Imād al-Dīn Abu'l Fidā Ismā'īl al-Qurashī al-Dīmashqī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, 4 vols. (Cairo: n.d.), 4:26 (Q. 38:1); 4:401 (Q. 68:1); 4:491 (Q. 85:1); 4:511 (Q. 90:1-2). Abu'l Su'ūd, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-'Imādī. *Tafsīr Abi'l Su'ūd*, 5 vols., ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā'. (Riyadh: n.d.), 5:369 (Q. 68:1); 5:513 (Q. 86:1-2); 3:527 (Q. 89:1-5). Shawkānī, Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-. *Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, 5 vols., 2nd printing (Cairo: n.d.), 5:267 (Q. 68:1); 5:464 (95:1-2). Ālūsī, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-. *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, 30 vols. in 15, (Beirut: n.d.), 30:86 (Q. 85:3); 30-121 (Q. 89:4); 30:141-142 (Q. 91:2-4).
16. In Farāhī, *Im'ān*, p. 5.
17. Bayḍāwī, 2:362.
18. Ibn Kathīr, 4:518.
19. Nīsābūrī, 30:59-60.
20. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr. *Al-Tibyan fī Aqsām al-Qur'ān*, ed. Ṭāhā Yūsuf Shāhīn (Cairo: n.d.), p. 46.
21. The following example will illustrate the point further. 51:1-6 and 52:1-8 are two Qur'ānic passages, each with a different MB—the winds in the first passage, Mount Sinai and a few other phenomena and objects in the second. Here is how Bayḍāwī (2:419) explains the point of the first oath: "[It is] as if, by referring to His power over these extraordinary and unusual phenomena, God were providing proof that He has the power to bring about the Resurrection for the purpose of meting out the promised recompense." And this is the comment he makes (2:424) on the second oath: "These phenomena, by which an oath has been sworn, constitute evidence for it [MA] in that they point to the all-embracing power and perfect wisdom of God, to the complete accuracy of His statements [about the future], and to the fact that He is maintaining a record of human actions for the purpose of meting out recompense to human beings." It is obvious that Bayḍāwī offers more or less identical explanations of

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the two passages and does not distinguish between the MB's of the two oaths in their relationship to their MA's. The same problem is often met with in Ibn Qayyim. After stating in the beginning of his book (p. 4) that the Qur'ānic oaths constitute evidence for the "fundamentals of the Islamic faith" (*uṣūl al-īmān*), Ibn Qayyim, in discussing the oaths individually, is usually content to point out that the MB substantiates one or more of the fundamentals of Islam, but seldom tries to account for the specificness of a given MB (see, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 7 [Q. 100:1]). Furthermore, even Ibn Qayyim has not broken completely with the traditional view: on quite a few occasions, he speaks of the oath as constituting *ta'ẓīm* for the MB (see, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 24 [Q. 90:1-2], 28-29 [Q. 95:1-3], 49 [Q. 100:1], 89 [Q. 79:1-5]).

22. *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 3 vols. in 1. Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally. Vols 1-2 (Leipzig: 1909-1919); G. Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzel. Vol. 3, (Leipzig: 1938, Hildesheim Reprint: 1981), 1:74-75.
23. *Ibid.*, 1:75.
24. *"In seiner Eigenschaft als Gesandter Allah's schwört Muhammed ausserdem bei der Offenbarung (36. 38. 43. 44. 50. 52. 68), bei der Auferstehung (S. 75), beim jüngsten Tag (S. 85) und bei seinem Herrn. Am meisten Schwierigkeit bereitet, nicht nur den muslimischen Exegeten von je her, sondern auch noch uns, das Verständnis einer dritten Kategorie von Formeln, in denen bei einer Mehreit weiblicher Gegenstände oder Wesen geschworen wird. Indessen hat auch dies Art ihre ausserqorānische Parallele." Geschichte, 75-76.*
25. See also Bell-Watt, Richard Bell. *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, rev. and enl. by W. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), Islamic Surveys, 8, pp. 76-78; and J. Pederson, "Kasam", *Shorter Enycyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers (Leiden: E.J. Brill, n.d.), p. 226.
26. Bell-Watt, p. 78.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 15. Incidentally, Farāhī thinks that the Hebrew word *yāmīn* in Psalm 144:8, 11 is properly translated "oath" and not "right hand." *Ibid.*
28. According to a tradition, this was Muḥammad's method of taking the oath of allegiance from women. See Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawā'id wa Manba' al-Fawā'id*, 10 vols. (Cairo: 1352-1353), "Kitāb al-Maghāzī wa'l-Siyar, Bāb al-Bay'ah 'alā'l-Islām allatī tusammā Bay'at al-Nisā'," 6:39.
29. Farāhī, *Im'ān*, pp. 15-16. Farāhī cites (*ibid.*, p. 16) from Zuhayr's *mu'allaqah* the well-known verse about Manshim, the woman from whom allies in a war bought perfume, rubbing it on themselves to symbolize their commitment to fight to the bitter end. For the verse, see Tibrīzī, al-Khaṭīb al-, (Abu Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn 'Alī al-Shaybānī). *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā'id al-'Ashr*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: 1388/1962), p. 215.
30. Farāhī, *Im'ān*, p. 16.
31. *Ibid.*, 16-17. Hence the expressions: *waṣala ḥablahū bi ḥablihī* (to join one's chord to another's), to indicate mutual support, and *ṣarm al-ḥabl* (to cut the chord), to indicate severance of relations.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 23. Note here the twin meanings of *shahida:* "to be present" and "to bear witness."
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 38. For a more detailed statement, and criticism, of Farāhī's view of *ta'ẓīm* in oath, see the subsection "Analysis and Observations," below.
34. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah*, pp. 310, 313.
35. Farāhī's *Im'ān* contains references to other Qur'ānic oaths, too, but they are not discussed here because they are too general. I have

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given my own translation of the Qur'ānic verses cited in this article. The Biblical citations are from the Revised Standand Version, *The Oxford Annotated Bible*, expanded edition, edited by Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

36. There is some justification for using the word "conjugate," for the Qur'ān says that God created all things "in pairs" (51:49), the Arabic word being *zawjayn*. For further details, see the explanation of 91:1–10 in this subsection, below, and Appendix I.
37. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah*, pp. 104–105. See also *ibid.*, p. 230.
38. For Farāhī's discussion of the oath, see *ibid.*, pp. 230 ff.
39. See, for example, Ṭabarī, 30:238–239, and Zamakhsharī, 4:268–269.
40. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah*, pp. 305–306.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 311–312. For Nābighah's verse, see *Dīwān al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī*, Ibn al-Sikkīt's recension, edited by Shukri Fayṣal (Cairo: 1388/1968), Introduction, p. 107.
42. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah*, pp. 310–312.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 314–315. The fig tree, Farāhī adds, is symbolic of divine bounty and wrath: the bareness of this tree in Autumn and its luxuriance in Spring are constant reminders of the story of Adam and Eve. Jesus spoke of the bareness of the fig tree to symbolize his departure and the misfortune of his rejecters (Matt., 21:18–19; Mark 11:13–14), and compared its luxuriance to his arrival and the good fortune of his people (Matt. 24:32–33; Mark 13:28–29; Luke 21:25–31). *Ibid.*, p. 326.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 312, 315–319. Farāhī adds that while the fig tree reminds one of the story of Adam and Eve, the olive tree symbolizes a great blessing of God, for we read in the Torah (Gen. 8:11) that it was an olive-leaf that was brought back by the dove Noah dispatched from the Ark. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 319–321.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 321–323.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 339–342.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 200–204.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 286–290.
50. Farāhī, *Im'ān*, p. 18. For the verse, see Tibrīzī, p. 75.
51. *Dīwān Shi'r Ḥātim ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ṭā'ī*, ed. 'Ādil Sulaymān Jamāl (Cairo: [1975?]), pp. 168–169.
52. Farāhī, *Im'ān*, p. 33.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
56. *Geschichte*, 1:75.
57. The references to Iṣlāḥī in Appendix A are to *Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān*.

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